



BENTON RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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November 29, 2023

DOE Deputy Secretary David Turk,

Over the last year, the President's Council on Environmental Quality has engaged in closed door "secret" discussions regarding the northwest power system and our hydroelectric resources, the dams that provide us with the power to keep our region running. Despite public power's repeated requests to be included or at least consulted on these talks, the administration has refused to allow us at the table.

The lack of transparency and dialogue the U.S. Government has had with the region and state is concerning. The exclusionary process and costs resulting from these secret negotiations could have a profound impact on energy prices in the Pacific Northwest — forcing the electric bills of U.S. ratepayers living in the region to skyrocket.

Benton Rural Electric Association (Benton REA) is a not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperative located in Prosser, WA. Benton REA currently serves more than 11,000 members in portions of Benton, Yakima and Lewis counties. Nearly 13% of the population in the three counties are living below the federal poverty level.¹ Protecting their access to affordable, reliable power is our duty. Adding an additional expense to these households is not only unnecessary – but irresponsible.

We are the public servants who will be charged with picking up the pieces and solving the problems caused by these discussions. We are the experts who can provide appropriate context, background, and facts to guide decision makers through the complexity of the problems they are trying to address. We should have been engaged to assist in these discussions from the beginning. Moreover, any potential agreements must be made public so people can learn about the "package of actions and commitments" the U.S. Government is proposing for our region.

Benton REA is one of many utilities in the region considering new long-term contracts with Bonneville Power Administration. The extensive uncertainty and risks created by these closed-door commitments unfairly and unnecessarily jeopardize the well-being of our members. It would be a dereliction of our fiduciary duty if we executed any long-term contract with this level of uncertainty.

¹ United States Census Bureau

Public power is built on the mission of providing reliable, affordable, and sustainable power to the communities we serve – and we take that seriously. We should be included in conversations that effect our ability to serve our members and our perspective should be considered before any commitments are finalized. Secret discussions are inappropriate and wrong. Our citizens deserve more. They deserve transparency. And they deserve a fair and balanced outcome that won't disrupt their lives and their ability to thrive in our communities.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ryan J Redmond', with a stylized, flowing script.

Ryan J Redmond
CEO, Benton REA